Alder Dolores Colon: “Good evening! My name is Dolores Colón and I am the alder for Ward 6 and the Chair of the Black and Hispanic Caucus. This evening I have the honor of giving our annual State of the City Address, together with my colleague from Ward 27, Alder Richard Furlow.

I would like to welcome our Mayor Toni Harp, President of the Board of Alders Tyisha Walker, all of my colleagues on the Board of Alders, our City Town Clerk, and residents of the city of New Haven. On behalf of the Black and Hispanic Caucus I thank you for joining us tonight to hear our vision for the beautiful city where we live. Building on the legislative agenda adopted by the full Board of Alders, the Black and Hispanic Caucus has been working to address key issues that affect the quality of life in our neighborhoods every day.

One year ago, the caucus gave our State of the City Address as part of a forum that focused on the Jobs Crisis. After that forum, Alder Clyburn and I had follow-up meetings with some of the employers in our city to discuss working collaboratively to try to tackle the jobs crisis. New Haven Works, an organization that connects qualified residents to good jobs, was an instrumental element in that collaboration.

Recognizing the magnitude of the crisis, we knew that we had to come together with other community groups focusing on the same issue. In June, we joined the Mayor, other elected officials, clergy, and members of New Haven Rising to call on our two largest employers to hire residents from the neighborhoods of need into good jobs. The rally brought thousands of people together around putting New Haven residents to work. Then in December we watched over 100 people from New Haven Rising get arrested in a civil disobedience outside of Yale-New Haven Hospital.

By this time Yale University had already agreed in writing to hire 1,000 New Haven residents over the next three years, including 500 from our neighborhoods of need. This commitment means 1,000 more of our residents will have good, meaningful jobs that enable them to take care of their families. The Caucus will be in constant communication with Yale University and New Haven Works as they take actions to meet their hiring goals. We thank Yale University for stepping up to plate on this issue. Now Yale-New Haven Hospital needs to step up to the plate and make a commitment to putting residents back to work. ”

Jose Soto tells his story about the Jobs Crisis.

Alder Richard Furlow: “Good quality housing is a key foundation for ensuring a healthy community and vibrant city. Studies show that poor housing conditions can lead to many health issues, stress, and depression. Adequate housing must be a part of healthy and inclusive neighborhoods where people feel a sense of safety and belonging in their community and social environment.

The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in New Haven is $1,178. Most experts agree that housing is affordable if it costs less than 30% of household income. As income goes down, however, the percentage of income spent on housing rises. Everyone in New Haven deserves to have access to quality housing and a pleasant environment that energizes them to pursue their dreams.

We've all heard of the blight in Church Street South, where affordable housing was provided with no livability. The issue of livability is not just an issue in Church Street South. Throughout our city, our residents are faced with many of the same issues. All housing, regardless of the cost, must meet basic standards for quality of life.

The definition of blight is when a building is in violation of the Property Maintenance Ordinances and poses an immediate or serious threat to health, safety, or general well being.

That means that all residents should live in a place that is kept in good repair. Our homes should have running water, heat in the wintertime, and a safe and healthy environment. Our homes should enhance and contribute to the character of our neighborhoods. There should be affordable units to accommodate family size.

The Mayor’s anti-blight initiative with LCI to identify abandoned buildings and underdeveloped housing is the first step in tackling this citywide issue. Alders are working diligently to highlight properties in their wards that are out of compliance. Together we are working to improve quality of life for everyone who rents a home in New Haven.

Our city is also still undergoing a crisis of homeownership. Over 200 New Haven families lost their homes to foreclosure just last year. Foreclosure was initiated on over 700 homes. Last year there were more foreclosures initiated against homes in New Haven than any other city in the state. Foreclosures affect the entire neighborhood, contributing to blight and depressed property values.

We need to ask: are residents being pushed into foreclosure when it could be avoided?  Can we be doing more to help people keep their homes— homes that are a key part to building up savings and wealth in our community?

The answer to these questions is *yes.*

One key contributor to this crisis is the role of mortgage servicers. Mortgage servicing companies collect debt on behalf of lenders, and they play a key role in deciding whether a homeowner can put together a payment plan and keep their home—or whether they lose their home to foreclosure.

The federal Consumer Finance Protection Bureau has found foreclosure and evictions were taking place unnecessarily due in part to problematic practices by mortgage servicing companies. Our Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro has twice introduced legislation to curb abuses by mortgage servicing companies. Yet it appears that problems continue.

Now you will hear from Gloria Council on her experience with one of those companies.”

New Haven Resident GLORIA COUNCIL: tells her story about the foreclosure crisis.

ALDER RICHARD FURLOW: “Thank you for your heartfelt testimony.

This is a crisis in our city. It points to the need for ongoing government support for mortgage modification, more regulation of mortgage servicing practices at the federal and state level, and more scrutiny of companies engaging in foreclosures. ”

ALDER DOLORES COLÓN: “The youth also have been a priority for our Caucus. Through the Charter Revision process we pushed to add youth voices to our Board of Education. That has now become a reality! Today we have two elected student representatives on the Board of Ed, and students across New Haven elected a new representative just over a week ago. Members of the Caucus and the Board actively participated in overseeing the election process and counting the ballots.

Our Board has been on the forefront of advocating for youth violence prevention in our community. We have worked to increase opportunities for our young people to have the safe spaces, positive environments, and nurturing role models they need to help them move in a positive direction. Through the Youth Violence Prevention grants over 25 youth serving organizations were given resources to support mentorship, job training and other creative ways to curb violence. These programs have served several hundred young people across our city.

We received 15.5 million dollars from the State to construct the Q-House. We all know that this is long overdue! Soon our kids will have a state of the art facility where they can receive the social, emotional, and educational support that are integral to their well being and development.

The Teen Escape Center is designed to tackle youth homelessness. This is an issue that is not often talked about here in our city. This facility will provide a comprehensive array of youth services.

With these two important facilities coming into our city, more young people growing up in New Haven will have a better chance at a good quality of life.

We know that we also need to support the youth facilities that are already supporting so many young people in our neighborhoods. That’s why we gave funding to four excellent youth serving organizations to do capital improvements and build their capacity.

This progress will help restore hope in our neighborhoods, and show our youth that they are our priority.

Members of the Black and Hispanic Caucus have also collaborated with the Summer Meals Program, because we know that when our schools are closed for the summer, children go hungry.

Hungry children do not thrive and do not retain the knowledge that they gain during the academic year.

As a result of our work to get the word out to parents about the Summer Meals Program, more than 42,000 extra meals were served to youngsters in our neighborhoods free of charge. Our Federal and State governments were so impressed with the scale of participation by our children that they gave New Haven money to serve dinner during the school year at five centrally located schools in our communities.

Right now there are four of the five dinner sites operating with the fifth one starting in the next couple of weeks. The Black and Hispanic Caucus will work to make sure that every hungry child can get dinner at a school near where they live. And we ask parents to echo our sentiments as well. The Caucus will not stop pressing on this issue until all five sites are open for dinner. Once all five sites are open, fewer children will go to bed hungry.

We were very disheartened by an article we read in the *New Haven Register* on April 3, 2016. The article told the story of a young kid, 13-years-old fishing on the Mill River to feed his family, with a nearby sign from the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection warning that there may be raw sewage in the water.

This tells us that children and families are hungry in this city, and will resort to any means just to bring a little nourishment to their homes. The five dinner sites need to be open to assist in preventing our children from going out looking for food in places that are not safe.

As a city it has to be our priority to do everything we can to address issues that affect our neighborhoods most in need. We have done some great things, but it is not enough. The Caucus is calling on every city resident to do a little more, and seize another opportunity to help.

In June, the Caucus will be doing another citywide canvass to tell our neighbors about the Summer Meals Program. Please come out and join us. This could save one more child from going to bed hungry.

We know that these three core issues of jobs, housing, and support for our youth are central to the standard of life in neighborhoods throughout our city.

I imagine a New Haven in which everyone has access to a good job and a decent home, and our young people grow up feeling fully supported, with a big vision for their future. We are calling on all of the stakeholders in our city to step up, and do more to achieve this reality.

Thank you for coming tonight and working together with us to bring hope to our neighborhoods, address the concerns of our communities, and lift up all of New Haven. Good night. ”